

Matthew 21:23-32

²³When he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?"²⁴Jesus said to them, "I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. ²⁵Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?" And they argued with one another, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' ²⁶But if we say, 'Of human origin,' we are afraid of the crowd; for all regard John as a prophet." ²⁷So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

²⁸What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' ²⁹He answered, 'I will not'; but later he changed his mind and went. ³⁰The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, 'I go, sir'; but he did not go. ³¹Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. ³²For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him.

Matthew 21:23-32, 2014

I read an article this morning about Dr. Phil responding when asked the question, “If you could interview anyone in the world, past or present, who would it be?”

“Jesus Christ. I would like to interview Jesus Christ. I would like to have a conversation with him about the meaning of life.”

I wonder if Dr. Phil has read much of the New Testament. Today we have the Chief Priest and elders of the Temple in Jerusalem, the highest authority in the church at that time, coming to interview Jesus, and they are turned upside down and inside out before it is over.

The tactic Jesus uses here is one he uses repeatedly throughout the gospels; answering a question with a question, and thereby changing the trajectory of the entire conversation.

“By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?”

If Jesus responds that it is by the authority of God, these good leaders of the Church, intimately familiar with the scriptures, will be able to refute His claim.

If He claims by his own authority He sets himself up as God separate from His relationship with the Father,

and as we understand the Trinity then, outside relationship with the Holy Spirit.

And so Jesus promises to answer their question only if they can answer His.

What about the baptism of John the Baptist, is it of God or man.

They find themselves in a no win situation and simply answer, “I don’t know.”

The priests and leaders are challenging Jesus. He has trampled on their territory so this is a reasonable challenge.

Chapter 21 opens, just the day before this encounter with the priests and elders with Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey to the praise and adoration of the people along the way,

And He immediately goes to the Temple and turns over the money changer’s tables and drove the merchants out.

They have reason to be concerned!

Jesus has challenged their authority.

Authority is kind of a tricky thing.

How do you differentiate authority and power?

You know that if someone exercises power over you it is by force. You may resist but your success depends on your ability to resist,

or how much power you have and it becomes a battle.

Authority, on the other hand is given. It is not something that can be taken.

You give authority freely while power is exerted on you without consent.

When you were a teenager, and for our teenagers here, peer pressure is not just about power, it is also about authority.

If one of your peers says, “Hey lets go out behind the bleachers and smoke some pot.” You are not just giving assent to the act by going, you are giving that person authority over your life.

If, however you say, “No, that is not good and right for me, I wont do that.” then you have retained authority over your life rather than giving it to someone else.

You can give authority to any number of people, situations, social structures, and you can also hold on to it, ensuring that it is you who has control over everything in your life:

If you want to live in that fantasy land.

This may sound or seem like such a trivial difference, but I believe it is significant particularly when we talk about our relationship with God.

God does not beat you down and steal your heart and force you to love and believe in Him the way a thief would beat you up and take your money, watch, jewelry and cell phone.

God invites you into a relationship with Him, calls you to give authority over your life to His Son Jesus Christ. You have a

choice like everyone else does as to how you are going to allow Jesus to have authority in your life.

This is an important thing for us in the church to remember. This world is changing faster than we can keep up.

Part of what we are about is the observation and interpretation of the events in this world in the context of our faith in Jesus Christ,

and sharing that with the world as our witness of faith and belief that there is a God and that God created, and redeemed this world through His Word, who;

*“though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,⁷ but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form,⁸ he **humbled** himself and became obedient to the point of death even death on a cross. Philippians 2:1-13*

You remember Martin Luther had something to say about authority: *sola scriptura, scriptura sola.*

Alone scripture, scripture alone.

That is the authority he identified as opposed to papal authority over the church.

The physical presence of Jesus in the world was replaced in part by the authority of the Holy Scriptures.

In this world today those scriptures are challenged every bit as much as Jesus himself was in His day.

Phyllis Tickle, whose lecture series the adult Sunday School class is studying right now,

tells about another time when the world changed in a dramatic way with one discovery which I know doesn't alarm you who have known it since before you were in first grade.

“The earth is round!”

That is insignificant to us and gets buried in the information we have access to these days.

But it hasn't always been that way

Imagine it is 1492, and you are 64 years old. You have been in the church all your life and you believe what the priest has taught you about God and the world,

including the world is flat.

That is the way the bible describes the world, in flat layers.

Then that year this young whipper-snapper named Christopher Columbus took off in a ship to prove the world is round and not flat. In the process he proves the church wrong.

Remember you are in 1492.

You are in the hustle and bustle of a European town hearing and smelling the horses pull carriages over cobblestone streets.

All of sudden the church is wrong. You have invested your life, and gambled your soul on the world being flat like the church taught.

So what difference does that make?

There are written records in London that bear out the rest of what Phyllis says in her video.

People in that age group remember the promise God made about raising them up to heaven after they die in a universe that is layered and flat.

So when you die in a round universe and go to heaven you will go straight up from Port Orange.

Now when your Lord died and ascended to heaven 1500 years ago, he ascended from Jerusalem in another direction from another part of this round world. He is somewhere else in heaven!

You will never see Him.

Remember it is 1492 – 1494. Can you imagine the heartbreak of those people.

This is what happened in that period of time. The records bear that out.

The authority of the scriptures has been challenged, the church has been proven wrong and its authority in the lives of people has been diminished.

With all the developments and things we have learned since the enlightenment the authority of the scriptures has faced many

challenges along the way, and now we seek to discover what authority the scriptures can have in this world.

What authority can God have? What authority can Jesus have?

You know what? It all comes down to you. You decide what and who has authority in your life, in your world?

Is it the scriptures? Is it God, is it Christ?

Today we will be meeting as a congregation to present our LR Ministry Plan and to make one important decision.

There are many ways to accomplish what God is calling us to. We make choices based on some authority.

Are your leaders one you give authority to?

Am I?

Sometimes we give the authority back to you because we want you invested in the final decision.

In our second lesson I believe Jesus sets the example we all must follow with regard to authority.

He “...emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, ⁸he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death...”

Leading up to this Paul writes:

“If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, ²make my joy complete: be of

the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. ⁴Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. ⁵Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus...”

This weekend you will be asked to open your hearts and minds to what you hear and see, and make that first decision about our future.

I only have the authority you give me.

Your elected leaders only have the authority you give them.
We serve here as humble servants trying to do God’s will.

Today we will give you authority over one question, asking you to make an important decision. The way this congregation responds will determine the future of this church for many years to come. There is a lot at stake.

You have the authority, to say yes or no.

I don’t want you to ultimately allow me to have authority over your life, I would rather you give that authority to Jesus and respond to His calling.